

# Glossary

## A

**Antebellum** The era that preceded the American Civil War, 1861–1865.

**At-Large Representative** A Representative elected to the U.S. House in statewide voting when a majority of the state delegation is elected by single-member, geographically-defined districts. This method for electing differs from the general ticket, in which an entire delegation is elected statewide. Until the mid-20th century, At-Large Representatives were often elected immediately following decennial apportionment. At-Large elections were abolished by federal law in 1968.

## B

**Barrio** A neighborhood defined by geographical location, particular feature, or history.

## C

**Caucus** A meeting of party members used primarily to select candidates for office and to consider other important business for furthering party interests. House and Senate Democrats refer to their meetings as caucuses. House and Senate Republicans describe their gatherings as “Conferences.” The term also describes an organization of House and Senate Members that is devoted to a special interest or legislative area.

**Census** An official count of a population that includes various related statistics. The U.S. Constitution mandates that a census be taken every 10 years.

**Chicano** Used by Americans of Hispanic and/or *mestizo* descent in the 1960s and 1970s as a term of self-identification that emphasized working-class origins as well as indigenous influences. The term is also used to describe the historical study of citizens of Mexican descent and a civil rights initiative that pushed the government to acknowledge civil rights issues that relate to Chicanos.

**Cold War** The state of ideological, economic, political, military, and cultural warfare between the United States and the Soviet

Union (USSR) from 1947 until 1991. Developing from divergent United States and Soviet foreign policies concerning the restoration of Europe after World War II, the conflict spread from Europe to the rest of the world. Although there were no direct military conflicts, the Soviet and U.S. superpowers tried to alter the international balance of power in their favor by competing globally for allies, strategic locations, natural resources, and influence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Cold War ended with the collapse and disintegration of the USSR in 1991.

### Committee (Standing, Joint, Select or Special)

A Standing Committee is permanently established by House and Senate Rules and has the ability to receive and report bills and resolutions to the full chamber. A Joint Committee is also established by House and Senate Rules, with membership comprised of an equal number of Representatives and Senators and a chairperson that traditionally rotates between a House and a Senate member each Congress. A Select or Special Committee is established by resolution for a defined period of time, is usually created to investigate a specific legislative issue, and may or may not have legislative authority.

### Commonwealth (in Puerto Rico, Estado Libre

**Asociado)** A nation, state, or political unit founded on law and united by compact or tacit agreement of the people for the common good. Used to refer to self-governing political units voluntarily associated with the United States, namely Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands. The commonwealth agreement between the United States and Puerto Rico is the Estado Libre Asociado (Free Associated State or ELA), first enacted in 1952.

**Compromise of 1850** The Compromise of 1850 was a series of bills organizing land ceded by Mexico to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. After President Zachary Taylor proposed carving two free states out of the land, Southern opponents threatened secession. Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky responded with a package of compromises that was later made into a single omnibus bill. Clay’s resolutions proposed admission of California as a free state; establishment of the territories of Utah and New Mexico without restrictions

on slavery; adjustment of the Texas-New Mexico boundary; assumption of the debt of the Republic of Texas; enactment of a stronger fugitive slave law; abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia; and approval of a resolution stating that Congress had no power over the interstate slave trade. Although his proposals failed to pass as one bill, each gained a majority on its own. By September 17, 1850, all of these proposals were signed into law by President Millard Fillmore.

**Constituents** People living within the geographic area that a Member of Congress represents.

**Cortes** Spain's parliament that consists of two houses: the lower house (*Congreso de los Diputados*), and the upper house (*El Senado*).

## D

**Delegate** A non-voting official in the U.S. House representing the following territories: the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Delegates serve two-year terms. Delegates cannot vote in the full House but are permitted to vote in committees and can introduce and cosponsor legislation. Under a House rule in place in 1993 and 1994, and restored in 2007, delegates are permitted to vote in the Committee of the Whole, in which the House considers appropriations, authorization and tax bills for amendment. If the votes of the delegates are decisive on any vote in the Committee of the Whole, the amendment is automatically voted on again in the full House, where the delegates cannot vote.

**Disfranchisement** The act of depriving an eligible citizen or a portion of the population of voting rights.

**District** A geographical area represented by a U.S. Representative.

## G

**Great Depression** The economic crisis and period of minimal business activity in the United States and other industrialized nations that began in 1929 and continued through the 1930s. During the 1920s in the United States, speculation on the stock market led to changes in the federal monetary policy. The subsequent decline in personal consumption and investments triggered the stock market crash of 1929, which, along with World War I debts and reparations, precipitated the Great Depression.

**Great Society** A wave of social reform legislation championed by President Lyndon Johnson in the mid-1960s and passed in

the wake of a Democratic sweep in the 1964 presidential and congressional elections. The crowning legislation of Johnson's reforms included increased aid for education; the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid which provided healthcare for the elderly and the poor; immigration reform; and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which outlawed literacy tests and provided federal monitoring of elections in southern states.

## H

**Hispano** A 19th-century term describing a person of Hispanic and/or *mestizo* descent native to the American West and Southwest.

**House Rules** The rules and precedents that govern the conduct of business in the House. These rules address duties of officers, the order of business, admission to the floor, parliamentary procedures on handling amendment and voting, and jurisdictions of committees. Whereas the House re-adopts its rules, usually with some changes, at the beginning of each Congress, Senate rules carry over from one Congress to the next.

## I

**Incumbency** The holding of an office or the term of an office (usually political).

## J

**Jim Crow** A system of segregation enforced by law and custom that aimed at the social control and the political and economic subjugation of African Americans in the South from the late 1800s to the 1960s. Hispanic Americans experienced varying degrees of Jim Crow segregation in the Southwest during this period.

## M

**Manifest Destiny** A term used in the 1840s to justify U.S. expansion into Texas, Oregon, and Mexico, on the theory that Providence had designated North America as a stage for demonstrating history's larger trajectory. Jacksonian journalist John O'Sullivan is reputed to have coined the term and wrote that Manifest Destiny was "to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."

**Mestizo** A person of American Indian and Caucasian ancestry.

## N

**New Deal** A period of political, economic, and social activity spanning President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first two terms in office (1933–1941). In response to the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration worked with Congress to provide an unprecedented level of emergency intervention to revive the economy and provide basic welfare to citizens.

**Nominating Convention** A meeting of local party officials to select the delegates who eventually designate party nominees for elective office or represent the locality at state or national conventions. Developed in the 1820s and 1830s, the system ensured that only one party member would run for an elective position while it provided structure and publicity for the party. In the early 20th century the modern primary election replaced the nominating convention as the principal method for selecting congressional candidates.

**Nuevomexicano** A 19th-century term used to describe Hispanics and Caucasians living in New Mexico. This publication uses the term to describe New Mexicans of Hispanic and/or *mestizo* descent.

## O

**Omnibus Bill** A term used to refer to a package of numerous, often unrelated, bills that are bundled together and considered in Congress as a single measure.

## P

**Patrón** The master or owner of an estate; also used to describe a political boss.

**Plebiscite** A vote by which the people of an entire country or district express an opinion for or against a proposal especially on a choice of government or ruler.

**Primary** A preliminary election, usually between aspirants from the same political party held to determine who will serve as the party's candidate in the general election.

## R

**Redistricting** The redrawing of U.S. House districts within states, following the constitutionally mandated decennial census and the apportionment of seats. State legislatures draw new districts based on population declines or increases that result in the addition or subtraction of House seats apportioned to the state.

**Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico** Puerto Rico's non-voting delegate, elected by the people of Puerto Rico for a four-year term. Puerto Rico has had a Resident Commissioner in the House since 1901.

**Rico** Literally “the rich”; a term used to describe affluent *Hispanos* and *Anglos* in 19th-century New Mexico.

## S

**Seniority** Priority or precedence in office or service; superiority in standing to another of equal rank by reason of earlier entrance into the service or an earlier date of appointment.

**Special Election** An election held by a state to fill a vacancy created when a Member of Congress dies, resigns, or is expelled. All House vacancies must be filled by election; Senate vacancies usually are filled by temporary appointments until a special election can be organized.

**Statutory Representation** A position defined by congressional mandate rather than by the United States Constitution. Territorial Delegates and Resident Commissioners are statutory representatives. Senators and Representatives are Constitutional Representatives.

## W

**Whip** An assistant House or Senate Floor leader who helps round up party members for quorum calls and important votes. Coined in the British Parliament, this term is derived from “whipper-in,” a person who keeps the dogs from straying during a fox hunt.